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Interpreting Rural: Doxiadis vis-à-vis East Pakistan[1]

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Ayub Khan (1907-74), military dictator and President of Pakistan from 1958 until 1969 considered Pakistan's 'illiterate masses of the countryside' (Khan 1965) to be more than an economic factor behind the country's underdevelopment. For him, the illiteracy of people in villages was a general symptom of moral and cultural regression. It was a sign of the inherent provincialism of the nation's rural frontier that would threaten the political and ideological unity of Pakistan (Ghani 2010: 291). The manifold rural development programmes that flourished under Ayub Khan's patronage emerged from this central conviction. In order to present the rural development programme's significance, Ayub Khan's government created a narrative of backwardness of the illiterate population and their political unconsciousness. In a sense, it was the discourse of political unconsciousness of the "illiterate population" that gave Ayub Khan an opportunity to present his government's rural development programmes as evidence of his regime's efficiency, benevolence and last but not least legitimacy. The rural development programme and its operational methods served as the visible proof of Ayub Khan's modernisation efforts (Inayatullah 1970). In this essay, I will discuss the architectural design process of one of the important rural development centres located

in Comilla, East Pakistan, which concurrently contributed and challenged the narrative construction of the political unconsciousness of the illiterate population.

Greek architect and planner Constantinos Doxiadis designed two rural development centres in Pakistan—one in Peshawar (West Pakistan) and the other one in Comilla (East Pakistan). The latter, which is the focus of this essay, was the biggest in pre-secession Pakistan and one of the most celebrated rural development programmes in the Cold War era (Stevens et al. 1976). In this essay, I suggest that Doxiadis' architectural design process offers an important avenue to understand the nuanced narrative construction of "rural backwardness" of East Pakistan. I also suggest that the narrative was instrumentalised to objectify East Pakistan, presenting the Eastern wing as quintessentially regionalist and divisive. The rural development programme served as a political instrument to address this threat. Architecture, too, served an essential component in forming this statist discourse. Doxiadis' architectural rhetoric responded ambivalently to this narration. On the one hand, Doxiadis conformed to Ayub Khan's strategy to use architecture to confirm the narrative of development and thus instrumentalised architecture to support his despotic governance. On the other hand, through the visual programme of architecture, Doxiadis simultaneously underscored the historic agency of Pakistan's, and in particular East Bengal's, rural population.[2]

The establishment of rural development programmes in postcolonial countries was driven by the political and cultural elites' aspiration to educate and develop the rural poor (Nicole 2011). The rural developers—a combination of sociologists, anthropologists, planners, designers, and political activists—held that, though the poor were located in the lower echelon of the development scale, they were still salvageable and could be "uplifted" under a continuation of the colonial civilising logic of 'moral and material progress' (Mann & Watt 2012; Zachariah 2005). In rural development projects in the 1950s and 1960s, architecture in general acted as a spatial catalyst to accelerate the rate of development, understood as a unidirectional ladder of 'progress'. Architectural historians have recently delved into the complexities and nuances of rural development projects in reference to the Cold War, burgeoning postcolonial nationalism, development politics, citizenship, and statecraft (Levin & Feniger 2018). The architectural projects of the rural development programmes were an important channel for disseminating the idea

of universal modernism through technical experts from the United States (US), the United Nations (UN), the communist blocs, colonial France, and Israel. The multifaceted rural development projects across the vast arrays of decolonising worlds were reincarnations of the colonial civilising mission. These projects aimed to impart and impose a universal liberal value over diverse rural societies of previously colonised countries.

Unlike in Zambia, where Doxiadis Associates (DA) worked on the planning and design of an elaborate rural development project, DA did not work on any actual rural development projects in Pakistan (Phokaides 2018). Ayub Khan's administration commissioned DA to design the academic and administrative headquarters of a rural development programme. Besides creating a space for administration, training, teaching and conducting social experiments, as historian Tariq Ali discusses, the Comilla centre served as the active site that made the rural development programmes and "experiments" visible in the global discourse of development (Ali 2018). Based on this suggestion, I will elaborate on how Doxiadis employed architecture as a communicative technique to propagate development, but also, conversely, to confront Ayub Khan's statist narration of East Pakistan. To both confirm and confront Ayub Khan's official narrative of "rural backwardness," the architecture of the Comilla centre reflects Doxiadis' imagination of a "natural" East Pakistan—an abstractly intertwined entity of the rural landscape and its "folk". Doxiadis' imagination of this natural cohabitation of land and people was informed both by his interpretation of "folk" as the cultural agent of history and also by the power politics that existed between Pakistan's two wings.

Comilla rural development programme

Revamping of the rural development programme began before Ayub Khan came to power. In a sense, much of the logic behind Ayub Khan's "development" of the "illiterate rural people" already existed before Ayub Khan formally incorporated Basic Democracy in the 1962 constitution. Ayub Khan's rural development programme was created on the foundations of pre-Basic Democracy (Naqvi 2013). Rural development projects were aided by the Village Agricultural and Development Programme (V-Aid)—a programme established in 1953 and supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the

Ford Foundation. V-Aid was one of over 60 US-supported community development programmes deployed in Asia, Africa and Latin America. However, by the end of the 1950s, the focus of American social theory and hence USAID's focus shifted from community development programmes (a social theory of propelling development by harnessing community support through hands-on projects) to more technology-oriented programmes, focusing on adult education, green revolution, contraceptives, mechanisation of agriculture, and intermediate technology (Cullather 2011).

Ayub Khan expropriated the existing V-Aid programme and reformed it along with this new technical shift that also supported his idea of Basic Democracy. On 12 June 1959, eight months after General Ayub Khan assumed power, he introduced a radical change of the existing public administration system in the name of Basic Democracy—an idea that was loosely based on the concept of "community development" promoted by major American sociologists and the United Nations (The Basic Democracies Order 1959). The main motivation behind the decentralisation effort was to disperse the country's political hierarchy in a way that it would be impossible to challenge the authority of Ayub's authoritarian state mechanism (Choudhury 1964). Ayub Khan envisioned a striated and neatly ordered society in the image of military administration in which each participant member's power of participation would be determined by a social rank based on a systematic chain of command of local administration. Basic Democracy in this regard is Pakistan's own version of modernisation theory that accounts a fixed trajectory of national development steered by industrialization and global capitalism. The rural people of Pakistan are not ready for a parliamentary democracy as they are stuck in a perpetual limbo between pre-modern rural agricultural society and modern industrialized society. Basic democracy would help them to be cultivated as citizens in the western sense and only then western polity could be applied. Until then the state will be helping to develop and transform the rural subjects into politically conscious citizens.

Ayub Khan facilitated the evolution of V-Aid from the community development model to an "experimental lab," focusing on inventing new social and agricultural technology. Among the two rural development centres in Peshawar and Comilla, the latter received more attention and resources as, in general, East Pakistan was considered a rural frontier vulnerable to moral and economic catastrophe (Raper 1970). The

perception held by Pakistan's central government of rural East Pakistan was deeply rooted in the ways in which Bengal was imagined by the Mughal and later the colonial state (Eaton 1996). The colonial state considered East Bengal mainly to be a source of food crops and cash crops such as jute (Ali 2018). However, the massive profit generated from this agriproduct was hardly reinvested in East Bengal's infrastructural development, and thus the urbanisation of East Bengal was negligible during the colonial time. Despite East Bengal's significant contribution to the making of the Mughal imperial and British colonial economy and its global capital, the administrators and governors, both Mughal and British, considered the region a backward agrarian frontier (Bose 2007a, b; Eaton 1996).

It was within this paradigm of colonial economic interest and cultural disinterest that East Bengal's deltaic landscape, riverine culture and land-based agriculture became the main markers of East Bengal Muslim identity. The imagination of sedentary agriculture as a constituent of Bengali existence was important from financial and administrative perspectives because a static community whose economy was based on regular land corps was easier to govern and tax (Chowdhury 2016). The financial interest of the colonial East Bengal governors systematically invented an image of agricultural land-based authentic "Bengali culture". Ayub Khan's conceptualisation of East Pakistan by and large represents a continuation. In order to create binary oppositions between West Pakistan's major urban centres, such as Lahore and Karachi, and East Pakistan's rural frontier, it was important for Ayub Khan to demonstrate the potential of the experimental rural development project in East Pakistan rather than in West Pakistan. In this sense, the rural development project was also an important marker of stressing the conceptual rural-urban divide between East and West Pakistan.

V-Aid was initially an autonomous organisation and was not accountable to the Ministry of Agriculture or to any other ministries. During Ayub Khan's presidency, V-Aid was weakened and was finally abolished in 1961. The main leaders of V-Aid were then returned to other sectors. For instance, Akhtar Hameed Khan, a pioneer of rural development in East Pakistan, returned to his previous position as principal of Comilla Victoria Government College after having served as the director of East Pakistan V-Aid for only one year (1954-55) (Khan 1965; Khan 1969, 1973, 1977; Thomas 1968). Under the leadership of Akhtar Hameed

Khan, the rural development of Comilla pursued a slightly different path compared with other contemporary rural development programmes in South Asia, such as the Etawah pilot project led by American architect and planner Albert Mayer or the Nilokheri rural development project led by Surendra Kumar Dey (Khan 1978; Karim 2019). The Comilla Model, nevertheless, was founded on cultivating a "co-operative capitalism" as a way to develop the rural frontier which was continued during Ayub Khan's regime (Aziz 1978; Raper 1970; Rahman 1979; Andreou & Ghaui 1978).

The Pakistan government commissioned the Ford Foundation to develop the organisational infrastructure of the new post-V-Aid rural development programmes in West and East Pakistan. After acceptance of the basic idea in 1955 by Prime Minister Chaudhry Muhammad Ali, the Ford Foundation appointed Michigan State University (MSU) as technical consultant. MSU Professor Floyd W. Reeves then carried out a survey across Pakistan to develop a proposal of the operational and capital budgets for the first four years (1957-60). The plan was finally approved the following year as the "Scheme for Pakistan Academies for Village Development – Peshawar and Comilla". However, the government did not approve a central board but created two separate boards to control the two different budgets and therefore the two different academic missions. Several workshops were organised, and booklets were published to train the social welfare workers in the principles of Basic Democracy.[3] The Ministry of Finance and Revenue of Pakistan finalised the plan in May 1957 and sent the final programme requirement to DA. That same year, DA was commissioned by the Ford Foundation to design the academy buildings in Peshawar, West Pakistan and Comilla, East Pakistan.

As a UN consultant for the US' International Technical Assistance Program, Doxiadis first came to Pakistan in 1958 to lead two different projects. The first was a joint United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Ford Foundation programme in East Pakistan to facilitate a nationwide education reformation project via strategic and architectural planning. The second project was to continue the settlement of the Korangi refugee camp in West Pakistan, originally started in 1953 by Michel Écochard (Muzaffar 2012; Daechsel 2011). Doxiadis had held various roles in the Greek reconstruction programme as chief supervisor of the Office of Town Planning Studies and Research (1941), Undersecretary and Director General of the Ministry of Housing and Reconstruction (1945-48), and coordinator of the post-World War II

Greek recovery programme (Kakridis 2013). It was through these programmes that Doxiadis developed a relationship with the US' technical missions, the UN, and the Harvard Advisory Group (HAG) that advised Pakistan's government on national budget and policy (Gant. 1959).

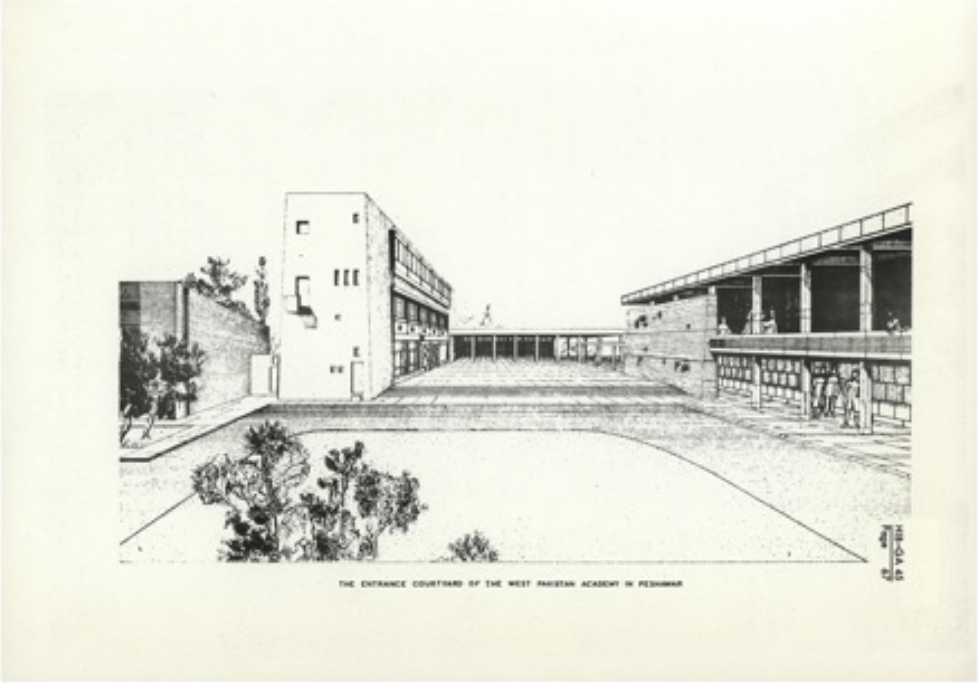
Both the Peshawar and Comilla rural development centres had the same programme, but because of the stark differences in climate and context, as Doxiadis explained, the two campuses took very different shapes (Doxiadis Associates 1959). The Peshawar campus was relatively more compact while the Comilla campus was less compact to ensure uninterrupted cross ventilation in the damp climate of Comilla. The design of Comilla used existing water tanks and trees as central landscape features. The entire campus in Comilla is surrounded by a carriage road on a low embankment to protect the site from the occasional floods from the surrounding low-lying agricultural fields, which were also used as demonstration fields.

On the other hand, in Peshawar, the site was located in an urban setting. The compact urban block of the site did not have any unique landscape features as in Comilla. It is not clear from the archival documents why an urban plot was chosen for the Peshawar campus. However, Doxiadis very carefully considered the climate in designing the façade and form of the Peshawar campus. The blocks of the Peshawar campus were relatively solid with smaller window openings, jail works and the use of Mashrabiya-like projected window details (Figure 1).

The buildings in the Peshawar complex were not executed according to how DA designed them. Most of the façade details were simplified to suit the budget. The Comilla campus on the other hand was built according to DA's design. The campus is characterised by lightness, low density, large windows to ensure ample cross ventilation, and projected sunshades. In the Comilla campus, Doxiadis used the stylised form of *dochala*—a vernacular dwelling form of rural Bengal—for the central auditorium/ community space (Figures 2 & 3). The dochala form added a powerful dimension to the monumental, yet rural, appearance of the Comilla campus. However, the adoption of a vernacular form as a metaphor is a striking aberration of DA's overall architectural philosophy. Doxiadis holds the use of symbolic monumental form in modern time tantamount to an anachronism; a "symbol" for Doxiadis essentially stood for the premodern.[4] In the following paragraphs, the discussion will focus on the

nuanced relationship between dochala and the narration of East Pakistan's ruralism and how Doxiadis' interpretation of East Pakistan's rural frontier had a more complex meaning than Ayub Khan's imagination of East Pakistan's political provincialism.

Figure 1: Peshawar Rural Development Centre, West Pakistan

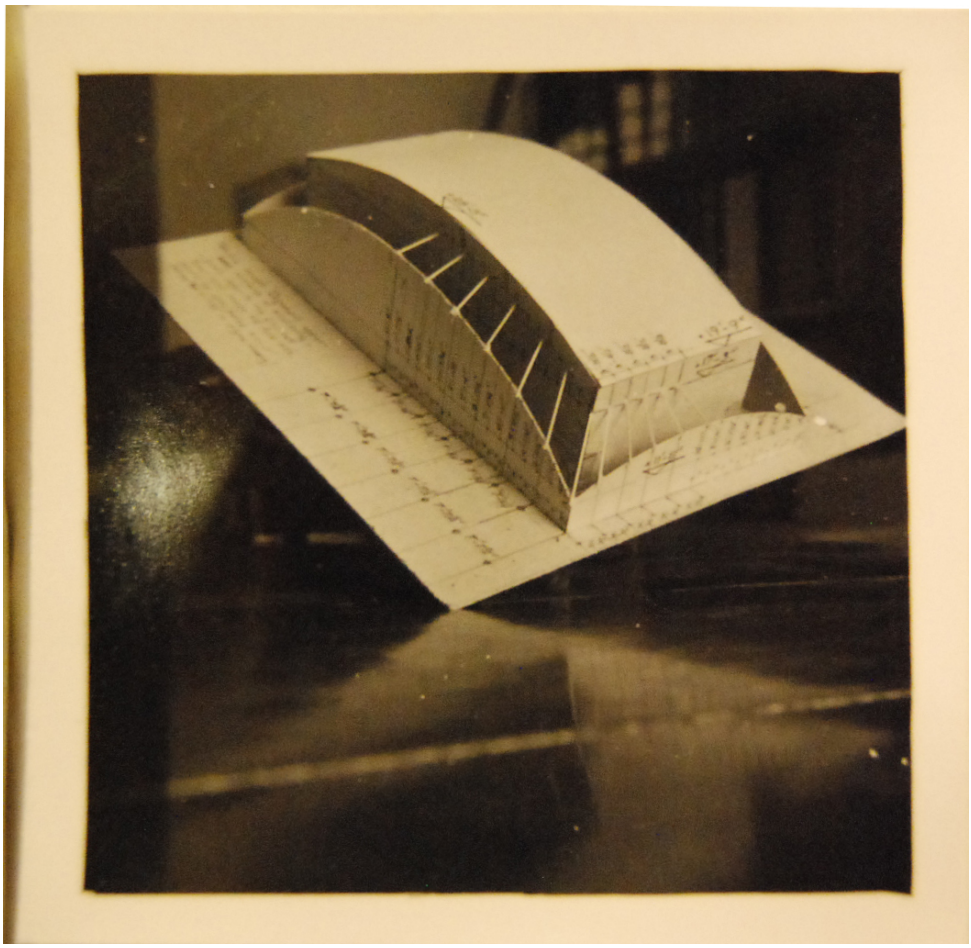


Source: Doxiadis Associates. 1959. Two academies for village development Comilla, East Pakistan – Peshawar, West Pakistan. *Ekistics*, 8 (45), 65-75. © Emma and Constantinos Doxiadis foundation.

Ayub Khan's regime that controlled the central state of Pakistan fostered a political economy that marginalised East Pakistan. This marginalisation was justified in a hegemonic state discourse that saw East Bengal as suspect due to its majority Hindu culture (Toor 2014), but also because of its 'otherness' in terms of its rural character. As mentioned above, these cultural characterisations of East Bengal were seen by the central state and its nationalist academia as factors contributing to the political demands of provincial autonomy. Provincialism in this discourse was nega-

tively connoted. However, the architectural practice and theory of Doxiadis complicates this easy correlation of rural-backward-provincialist.

Figure 2: Study model of the curved roof at the Comilla Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD)



Source: Doxiadis diaries. 1962, vol. 140 © Emma and Constantinos Doxiadis foundation.

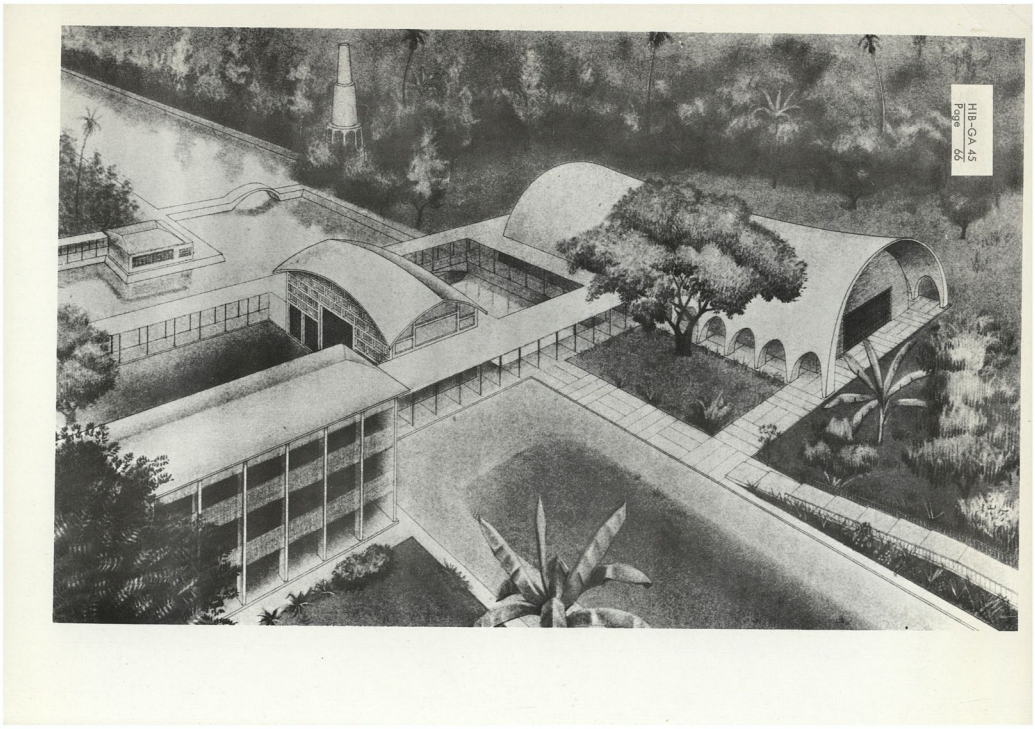
Figure 3: The central auditorium and community space, Comilla BARD

Source: Photograph by Aminul Hassan.

Dochala and Monumentalisation of the Folk

The design of the campus in Comilla is based on loosely formed low-height (i.e. three to four stories high) blocks connected via long networks of covered corridors (Figures 4 & 5). The blocks and the corridors neatly frame the series of landscaped courtyards that were primarily designed for permitting natural light and ventilation. These courtyards were not designed for gatherings or activities but were instead conceived as environmental pockets. The architectural form of large, north-facing windows and continuous overhangs and sunshades is informed by the region's climatic setting but also reminds us of the use of the *chajja*[5] in Mughal architecture. Individual classrooms were designed as separate rooms connected by corridors, while the dormitory was designed as a large block of individual bedrooms combined with a cafeteria and a recreation room. The overall planning of the complex was primarily determined by the climate.

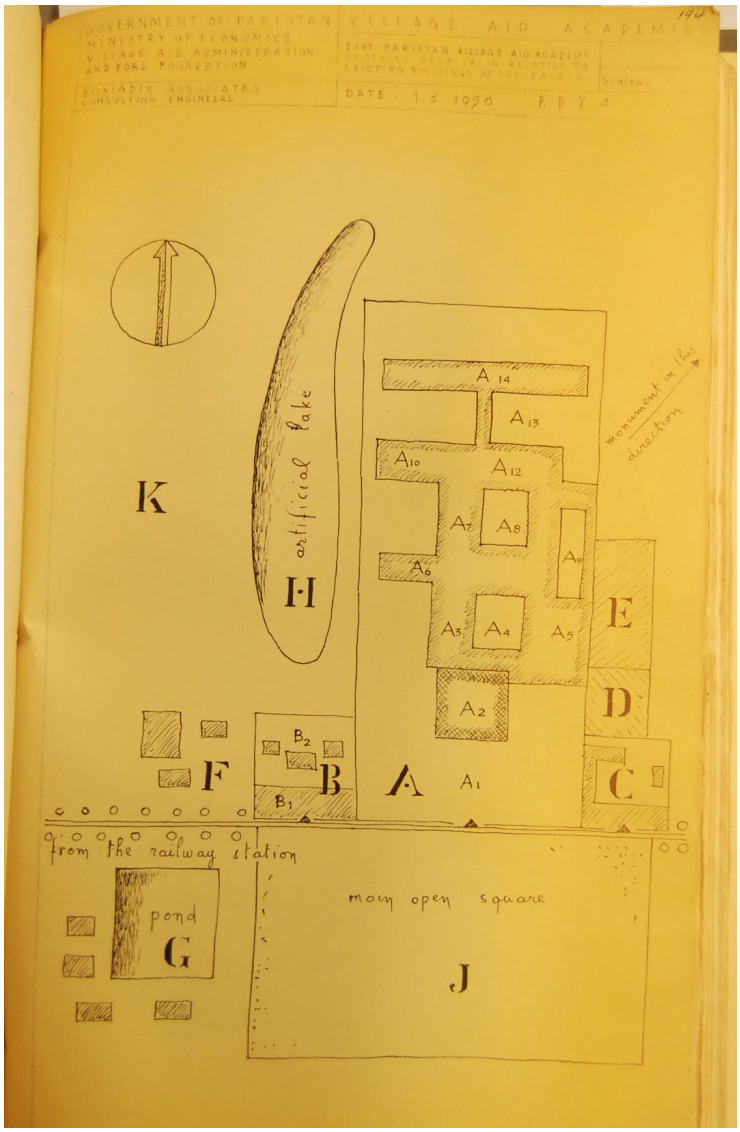
Figure 4: Comilla Rural Development Centre



Source: Doxiadis Associates. 1959. Two academies for village development Comilla, East Pakistan – Peshawar, West Pakistan. *Ekistics*, 8 (45), pp. 65-75. © Emma and Constantinos Doxiadis foundation.

The predominant north-south orientation of the buildings, the use of lush landscape based on local trees and plants, and the treatment of the façade—characterised by thin columns and shadow-casting devices together with the wide windows having ingeniously designed fixtures to make it possible to open up the entire south façade—are all driven by climatic sensitivity. Constructed by the Public Works Department, this complex was designed to suit the minimal construction budgets of the time. The austere minimalism expressed in the whitewashed, stripped modern form corresponds with the emerging discourse of site- and climate-specific regionalism and the "tropical architecture" of the time.

Figure 5: Diagram study of the site and existing buildings, Comilla BARD



Source: Pakistan Diaries and Reports, DOX PP. 85-93, August 1955-NOV1956, vol 7. Source: Doxiadis Associates. 1959. © Emma and Constantinos Doxiadis foundation.

Doxiadis spent more time in West Pakistan than in East Pakistan and invested substantially to survey and study the local building industry and the vernacular climatic devices in West Pakistani architecture. In compari-

son to West Pakistan, Doxiadis' study of the local architecture of East Pakistan is sparse. Doxiadis primarily used meteorological data to decide which climatic factors to address in his East Pakistan design. In 2017, Hadjopoulos, a retired senior architect of DA, personally told me that Doxiadis' approach to architecture in the developing countries was ambivalent because, on the one hand, he preferred scientific universalism but, on the other hand, he was genuinely eager to maintain the cultural diversity and uniqueness of the place. We see the similar ambivalent tendency in Doxiadis' buildings in West and East Pakistan that incorporate an ingenious climate-responsive form within modernist rhetoric.

The recurring use of dochala in DA's work in East Pakistan had two major sources of inspiration. The first was the archetypal tropical hut of the dining hall at the then University College Ibadan (now the University of Ibadan) in Nigeria designed by the protagonist of tropical architecture Maxwell Fry. The second was the appropriated form of the Bengal dochala in Mughal architecture. These two sources served two different purposes in DA's architecture, which I will discuss in the following paragraphs.

Figure 6: University College, Ibadan: residential college dining hall (Sultan Bello Hall)

Source: Royal Institute of British Architects Photo archives. RIBAPIX REF No. RIBA 76810.

Semblance between Fry's rural hut and Doxiadis' dochala is striking (Figure 6). The campus was opened in 1955, five years before Nigerian independence and one year before Doxiadis designed the Comilla campus. Architect Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, developed their distinct architectural philosophy for the British colonies in the tropics through the *Colonial Development and Welfare Act* of 1940 (Oladiti, Adeoye, Idowu 2016). Under this act, Britain wanted to demonstrate its benevolence and altruism toward the colonies by establishing educational institutions across British West Africa. Fry considered the dining hall to be an important social hub and thus portrayed it as a rural hut. However, Fry's hut did not follow any specific style from the West African vernacular building. Proudly described as the crown of Fry's career, the hut was rather a stylised archetype of a hut.

Architectural historian Rhodri Windsor-Liscombe describes Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew's architecture as an outcome of the late colonial reformist efforts—the simultaneous anxiety and altruism that hoped to reform and thus justify the continued operation of colonial rule (Liscombe 2006). Liscombe also explains that Fry and Drew's social approach to site-specific architecture and the "hybrid aesthetic" was inspired by the social agendas of modern movements in European architecture. A major focus of Fry and Drew's tropical modern architecture was the reinterpretation of local visual motifs and pattern and a blending of those motifs in a modernist yet climate-sensitive façade: sunshades, balustrades, and screen walls. What the pre-war architects would dismiss as decorative and ornamental, the tropical architects argued was at the core of non-Western civilisation.

In their seminal essay "The African experiment" (1953), Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew explained this position (Fry & Drew 1953). Iain Jackson and Jessica Holland identify Fry and Drew's use of stylised and decorative African visual motifs as a counteracting effort by colonialists to confine conflicting forces within the colony (Jackson & Holland 2014). They also suggest that such efforts aimed to signify West African custom and identity, but in an ahistorical way. Liscombe concluded that this 'wedding of decorative effect' (Liscombe 2006) was neither African nor European but represents a distinct tendency of modern British eclecticism, which became particularly visible in the colonies.

Tropical architecture as a discourse developed against the backdrop of burgeoning postcolonial nationalism and the dissolution of French and

British colonialism in Africa, South and South East Asia. Scholars have problematized the practice and discursive formation of tropical architecture, which at first glance may appear as a mere pragmatic response to the climatic situation of the colony. The emergence and development of tropical architecture was entangled within the cultural and political relationships among imperialism, postcolonial nationalism, and place specificity, topography, atmosphere, and physical context (Beynon 2017; Chang 2016). "Place" or regionalism was an essential reference point for tropical architecture, confronting the universalising forces of modernism (Crinson 2008).

Tropical architectural discourse was also a part of the growing tendency among modernist architects to conflate regionalism and development. For example, Richard Neutra, an acclaimed modernist, characterised his works as principal architect and consultant to the Committee on Design of Public Works in Puerto Rico between 1943 and 1945, as 'regionalist' (Neutra 1948). The American use of the term "regionalism" was different than colonial use of "tropical". However, tropicalism, regionalism and developmentalism were ambiguously intertwined within Doxiadis' architectural language in Pakistan.

Doxiadis was well aware of the "crown" of Fry's career, and it is not unlikely that he was inspired by the idea of signifying vernacular identity through metaphorical form. DA's other major project in East Pakistan was the National Academy for Educational Management located established in Dhaka in 1959 (known at the time as the Education Extension Centre) in which the stylised rural dochala mosque, posed peacefully at the edge of a small pond, acquired a more dramatic appearance (Figure 7). The small scale and the curvilinear roof shape represent the archetypal rural hut and a response to the region's heavy monsoons and sedentary agriculture. Dochala thus evokes a sense of rural domesticity and cultural identity. However, while Fry's tropical architecture based on the stylised hut in Nigeria was a tactic to reconcile the colonised and the coloniser, what did Doxiadis' dochala refer to in the context of modernism and vernacularism? Which conflictual forces did this form intend to reconcile?[6]

Figure 7: Central Mosque of Education Extension Centre (now demolished)

Source: Photograph by Shabab Raihan Shuvo.

Doxiadis' first encounter with the dochala form was not in East Bengal but during his visit to the Naulakha Pavilion at the Lahore Fort, which has the distinctive dochala roof as its main architectural feature (Figure 8). Doxiadis wrote:

> A very interesting building in this courtyard is the Naulakha Pavillion [sic] on one of the walls vertical to the main hall of the Shish Mahal. Its characteristic element is the curved roof, the one which according to some historians reminds of the thatch roofs of East Bengal and proves the influences of Bengali elements in Mughal architecture. [7]

Historian Richard Eaton (1996) in his seminal work on the rise of Islam in Bengal has explained how the dochala-thatched mosque symbolised the political authority over the newly established villages in East Bengal (Figure 9). Every time the Mughal *subedars* established a new village, they built a thatched dochala mosque as the public centre of the village—a symbol of Mughal authority yet empathising local visual culture. The dochala attained a dual meaning in Mughal architecture—a symbol of regional identity and a political gesture of an inclusive and centralised Muslim empire. It cannot be said with certainty that Doxiadis' use of the dochala roof was intended to carry the same symbolism, but it was not unlikely that Doxiadis was aware of this dual meaning. From West

Pakistan's perspective, the symbol of the dochala in Doxiadis' work went beyond regional dogma and reincarnated the lost pride of the Mughal Empire, which had successfully tamed even its most distant provinces, such as Bengal. No doubt this second reading of the dochala was highly important at a time when the embroiling political rows between Pakistan's East and West halves were crucial.

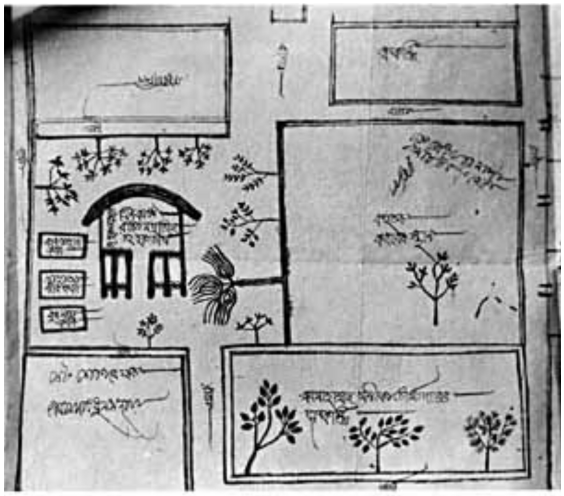
Figure 8: Pages from Doxiadis' diary showing his visit to Naulakha Pavilion, Lahore


A very interesting building in this courtyard is the Naulakha Pavillion on one of the walls vertical to the main hall of the Shish Mahal.

Its characteristic element is the curved roof, the one which according to some historians reminds of the thatch roofs of East Bengal and proves the influence of Bengali elements in

Source: Pakistan Diaries and Reports, DOX PP 85-93, August 1955- NOV 1956. © Emma and Constantinos Doxiadis foundation.

Figure 9: Thatched mosque at Lohagara, Satkania thana, 1720



Source: Richard M. Eaton. 1996. *The rise of Islam and the Bengal frontier, 1204-1760*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

The dochala, in Doxiadis' architectural interpretation, became the symbol of archaic rurality of East Pakistan, a character that needs to be both celebrated and despised. We can also suggest that the dochala served as a political symbol for identifying the new Pakistani state with the Mughal state, as both faced formidable challenges in establishing authority over the far-flung provinces, of which Bengal was most notorious for its marshy land and numerous tortuous rivers. The dochala was a ubiquitous vernacular dwelling of rural Bengal during pre- and early modern times. We especially see its widespread appropriation in the architecture of the seventeenth century temples and mosques in Bengal, such as the Fateh Khan Tomb in Gaur. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' elite society, be it the local Hindu *zamindar* (Dutta 2010), the Muslim *sultan* (Hasan 1989), or the mighty Mughal, were always fascinated by this form. Art critic Burhanuddin Khan Jahangir (1982) argues that the early modern appropriation of this form in temple and mosque architecture, the only community architectures of their time in the Bengal frontier, was part of a political project of the elites to identify themselves with the people, or as Doxiadis would say, "folk". Elites who commissioned those projects did not live in dochalas, but their subjects or the users of this architecture lived in dochalas. Hence, the dochala in its appropriated form

became a political gesture and an imaginary bridge through which the rulers identified themselves with the ruled.

I have argued elsewhere that Bengal political elites' transformation of the humble dwelling of the rural people into a monumental form was a way to acknowledge the vernacular people's share in the power structure (Karim & Ghafur 2008). The appropriated dochala in Bengal thus has a history of reconciling the governed and governing, the elite and the subaltern. Doxiadis' dochala performs a similar role but with a broader scope as his dochala not only aimed at bridging the gap between the urban elites and the rural subaltern in East Pakistan; Doxiadis' dochala also aspired to break down East Pakistan's representation of regressive rural as opposed to the self-proclaimed advanced West Pakistan. In a 350-page report to the Pakistan government, Doxiadis suggested that Pakistan's true architectural expression should come from its "folk" architecture and not from Mughal monuments.[8] Doxiadis believed that monumental architectural form is inappropriate in Bengal as, historically, Mughal monuments represent an imperial will that suppresses the will of the folk. Doxiadis' interpretation of Bengal's history and his abstraction of "folk" is a different discussion, but what is important for this essay is to note that Doxiadis thought the only form worthy of monumentalisation in Bengal was the dochala—a symbol of vernacular empowerment, or in Doxiadis' language, 'creating monumental expression of the people themselves.'[9]

Landscape and the narrative of ruralism

In the statist imagination, East Pakistan's rural population was the quintessential force of divisive and regionalist forces that posed a threat to the unity and sovereignty of Pakistan. The narrative of East Pakistan's rural backwardness was not essentially a social and scientific thesis of East Pakistan's underdevelopment. Rather, it was part and parcel of a set of representations by the Pakistani state that characterised East Bengal as a hotbed of provincialism and at its worst, separatism. This anxiety was rooted in the fact that state power was concentrated in West Pakistan. The narrative of rural backwardness fed into this discourse, which was confirmed by contemporary (pre-secession) political scientists that held East Bengal's rurality as an important contributing factor to East Pakistan's separatist aspirations (Akanda 1970).

West Pakistan's political and cultural dispositif [10] imagined and portrayed the entire East Pakistan as a vast and unbroken swath of an allegedly "backward" rural setting (Ahmad 1958). The people of East Pakistan were imagined in essentialist terms as naturally rural and passive, which was inherited from the longstanding colonial construction of the "passive" and "effeminate" Bengalis (Chatterjee 1996). After independence, the colonial narrative of East Pakistan/Bengal's 'natural rurality' continued to thrive through various mediums of cultural imagination. For instance, the *Pakistan Review* published numerous articles, poems and short stories about East Pakistan, and almost every publication on East Pakistan was either on its villages, rivers or its "tribal population". The *Pakistan Review* was the Pakistan government's national cultural monthly publication beginning in 1953, and it documented and disseminated the cultural, industrial and scientific achievements of Pakistan. Through the pages of the *Pakistan Review*, West Pakistan's political dispositif projected East Pakistan to be a distinct region, an epitome of underdevelopment, and regressive, or in other words *rural*. East Pakistan stood in the way of a liberated Pakistan and argued that it required development.

The political idea of Pakistan emerged as a deterritorialised, modern and universal place—a safe refuge for all suppressed and marginal populations (Devji 2013). Pakistan was conceived as an experimental site in which all social and economic differences, or the distance between God and its subjects, fall into singularity (Majeed 2008). The reality was that it was too complex to conceive an ideal Pakistan as the accommodator of all differences. Eventually, the state of Pakistan aimed at inventing national unity by erasing differences and by imposing a universal ordering structure on everything ranging from religion to language. This move to eliminate all differences was paradoxical because at the time of its birth the political idea of Pakistan was precisely devised to resist the hegemony of any overarching structure—Western colonial or domestic Hindu—so that Muslim as the minority would no longer be victimised.

This hegemony emerged from the state's scepticism about the fidelity and loyalty of its provinces because the Muslim League was largely unsuccessful in establishing a representative authority (like the Congress in India) throughout the newly formed country (Lieven 2012). The very idea of Pakistan was contested by various groups such as the powerful Hindu and Sikh landowners in Punjab under the Unionist banner, the

Hindu businessmen in Sindh, the Pushtun nationalist party in North-West Frontier Province, and the local chieftains in Balochistan (Lieven 2012).

After independence, West Pakistan's Urdu-speaking urban middle class maintained cultural and political dominance. Although, during the anti-colonial struggle, some of the strongest political support for Pakistan had emerged in East Bengal, the central authority of Urdu-speaking West Pakistanis considered the Bengalis as the greatest threat to Pakistan because of the anxiety of being linguistically and culturally indistinguishable from Hindu-dominated West Bengal (Mookherjee 2012). Within this political environment, East Pakistan emerged in binary opposition to West Pakistan, if not Pakistan itself. In doing so, the narrative of "rural backwardness" underscored East Pakistan's rural frontier as anti-Pakistan, anti-developmental and anti-civilisational. *East* in general stands for sovereign Bengali Muslim nationalism as opposed to a hegemonic and all-encompassing Pakistan (Bose 2009). The narrative of "rural backwardness" corresponds with the theory of East Pakistanis being proto-Hindus and a racially degenerated separatist force (Mookherjee 2012). East Pakistan's racial and moral degeneration was imagined to be entangled in its vast deltaic, flood-prone, soft, tropical, damp landscape (Rashid 1965).

East Pakistan and its perceived rural, proto-Hindu culture served as a binary opposition to an ideal Pakistan and generally represents the divisive and regionalist tendency observed within Pakistan. A visual marker of this is its distance, as well as its incomprehensible and impenetrable "nature". Bengal for the Pakistani state was a physically fragmented, incomprehensible landscape, a conceptually impenetrable existence. Nature and the landscape of East Pakistan were markers of disintegration and distance from the main ideals of Pakistan. For instance, Syed Shahid Husain, an influential civil servant from West Pakistan, recounted in his memoir his emotional experience when he first encountered the nature of East Pakistan:

> We visited different places but the most memorable experience was the drive from Chittagong to Rangamati. The whole Valley was breathtakingly beautiful. Rangamati itself was a very scenic place. I had not seen such breath-taking greenery before having lived my entire life in arid parts of Sindh where it wouldn't rain for years. A visit to Geneva a few years later did not erase the lingering impression of East Pakistan. (Husain 2010: 4)

In the popular psyche of West Pakistan, East Pakistan with its lush greenery had been established in stark opposition to the relatively arid and rough West Pakistan to such an extent that green became the symbol of Bangladeshi nationalism during 1970-1, and green was eventually adopted in the flag of independent Bangladesh.[11]

The first time Doxiadis visited East Pakistan, he came with a similar ideological predisposition about East Pakistan. He imagined East Pakistan being vulnerable to the prey of communism, Hinduism, and India. This reflected the tropes of the 'other' that informed state anxiety about threats to its centralised authority, territorial sovereignty and national ideology. The ways in which Doxiadis was informed about East Pakistan were influenced by how West Pakistan's administrators and civil officers were mesmerised by Bengal's nature and people. During his journey from West to East Pakistan, Doxiadis draws the straight-line connecting West and East Pakistan (Figure 10). Drawing this connection had no practical value in his works and probably simply meant the air route between the two wings. Yet, this drawing must not be devalued as merely a doodle of a designer during idle moments in an airplane; this drawing represents Doxiadis' urge to connect the East Pakistan to his rational mindset that was conditioned and centred around West Pakistan.

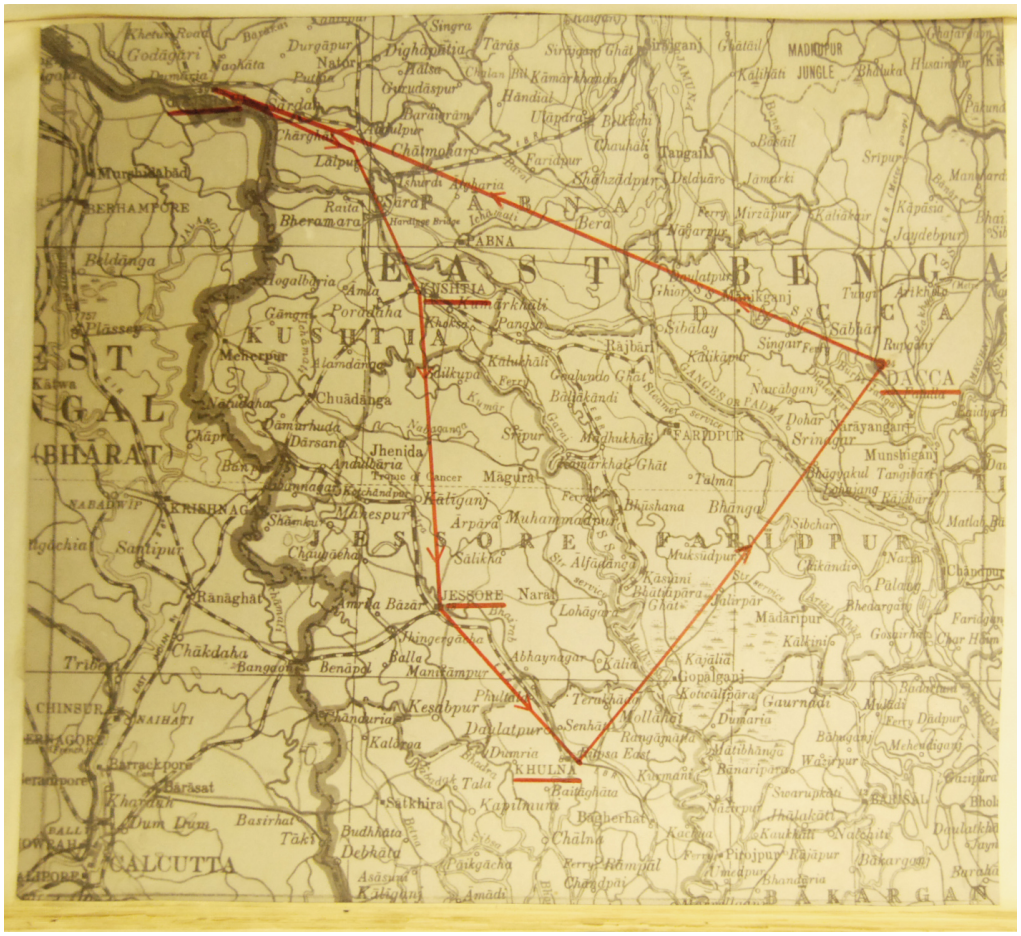
Figure 10: Straight line connection between Karachi and Dhaka.

Source: Pakistan Diary vol. 4, DOX-PP. 40, Jan-Feb 1955. © Emma and Constantinos Doxiadis foundation.

Because of the very limited road connection (Figure 11) in East Pakistan's rural areas, Doxiadis' main mode of transportation within East Pakistan

was an amphibian biplane. Figure 12 depicts a photo of the seaplane by which Doxiadis travelled across East Pakistan. In the photo taken by Doxiadis, the biplane stands closely to a local sailboat. The photo gives us an idea about the ways in which Doxiadis observed his encounter with the rural East Pakistan. Doxiadis wrote about his experience, '[…] I can see the whole of Bengal, this vast alluvial plain consisting of soft soil, the surface of which is continuously changing under the influence of the everything-controlling factor: the water.'[12]

Figure 11: Doxiadis' travel route through East Pakistan: Dhaka-Rajshahi-Kushtia-Jessore-Khulna-Dhaka.



Source: Pakistan Diary vol. 4, DOX-PP 40, Jan-Feb 1955. © Emma and Constantinos Doxiadis foundation.

Doxiadis concluded that the shifting landscape made it hard for architects to create conventional architecture in East Pakistan. He continued to

characterise East Pakistan as a place for which architecture and urban planning in the conventional sense was inappropriate because the natural setting of Bengal and its people was not ready for anything 'permanent' or 'monumental.'[13] No wonder that, Doxiadis argued, even the Nobel laureate and Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore, failed to appreciate the Athenian Parthenon, an enduring example of classical monumentality. Building architecture for East Pakistan, the way Western civilisation would understand it, would be a waste of human labour, Doxiadis concluded.[14]

Figure 12: A local boat that transported Doxiadis and others from the amphibian plane to the river shore.

Source: Pakistan Diary vol. 4, DOX-PP 40, Jan-Feb 1955. © Emma and Constantinos Doxiadis foundation.

While traveling in a small amphibian biplane, Doxiadis experienced rural East Pakistan mainly from above. When he and his team were on the ground, they also took numerous pictures of the village schools' class-room interiors as well as exterior views of their study subjects, which were mainly local buildings. The pictures taken from the ground mainly served to provide numerical data while aerial photographs served as the ideological frameworks for the design. Doxiadis' diary is full of images of winding rivers and canals creating contrasts with geometric divisions of agricultural land framed by occasional and small but very dense villages

(Figure 13). In the aerial images Doxiadis took from his plane, we see villages as dispersed settlements scattered over the vast alluvial landscape of East Pakistan. Doxiadis however explained that these apparently scattered settlements had their inherent logic and order, which he illustrated in quick sketches and small diagrams (Figure 14). He considered his position to be not quite achieving an objective view of his research subject. He wrote:

> [W]e should try and disconnect from the actual problem, increase the distance between it and ourselves. This has been attempted in several ways in several cases, from the ancient Greek [who] shaved half of his head in order to be unable to go out in the agora […] These look to me rather antiquated ways. At present, the plane which takes me to a big geographical distance helps me to see more and more clearly my problem.[15]

Through the aerial photos, Doxiadis systematically created an image of a flat, riverine and plough-based agricultural landscape as the prime cultural mark of both East and West Pakistan. Doxiadis considered "seeing" as a research method. But "seeing," and especially seeing as a consultant's research method, was not merely a scientific observation but a very conscious if not carefully choreographed and subjective investigation of the environment. His diaries presented a meticulous and astonishingly detailed account of his purposeful traveling through a landscape of infinite potential for future growth. The photos also represent his visual and narrative records, piercing through the foreign land. Historian Markus Daechsel shows that aerial photography was a strong tool for the development officers to create an overarching structural framework for development theory (Daechsel 2015). Daechsel also argues that aerial travel inscribed a deep sense of authority, independence and heroic zeal in the minds of the development officers as being the winged hero of modernisation.

Figure 13: Aerial view of the landscape between Sardah and Kushtia

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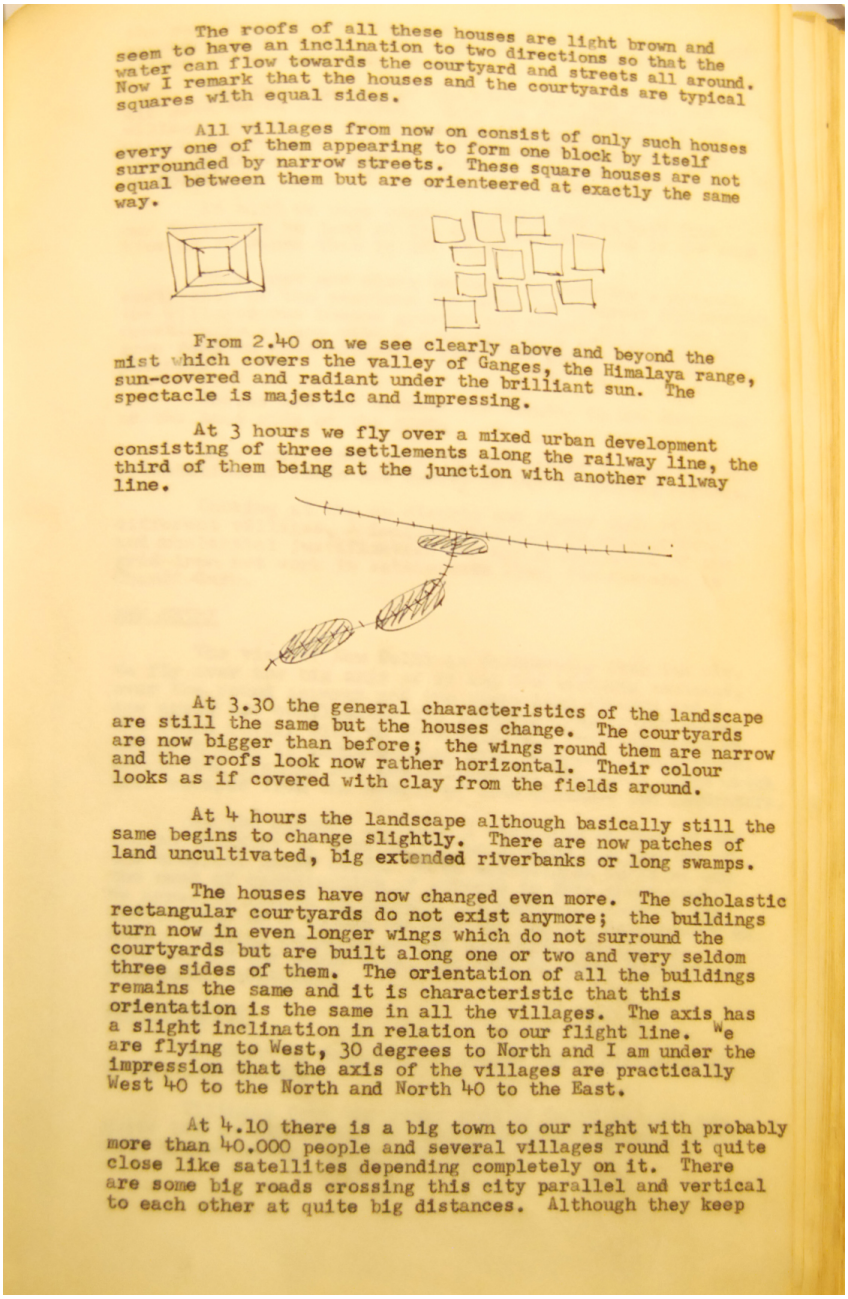
Then we fly over Sardah which has an artificial settlement probably built in two phases. The older part seems to be covered by big trees whilst in the new one the trees are quite young. Both parts look quite irrational asthe blocks have only two houses each and too much space in between them which lies waste not being useful to the people and creating only a place which is neither private nor common in the sense that it can be taken care of by such a small community and be properly kept.

From there we fly more to the South always on the left bank of Ganges until we reach Kushtia. The landscape between Sardah and Kushtia does not present any special characteristics and the only thing that can be remarked is that the water of all rivers is very low and big areas appear full of sand. In most of the cases there are small vertical roads leading directly to the river bank.

Source: Pakistan Diary vol. 4, DOX-PP 40, Jan-Feb 1955.

Figure 14: Diagrams of rural development



The roofs of all these houses are light brown and seem to have an inclination to two directions so that the water can flow towards the courtyard and streets all around. Now I remark that the houses and the courtyards are typical squares with equal sides.

All villages from now on consist of only such houses every one of them appearing to form one block by itself surrounded by narrow streets. These square houses are not equal between them but are orienteered at exactly the same way.

From 2.40 on we see clearly above and beyond the mist which covers the valley of Ganges, the Himalaya range, sun-covered and radiant under the brilliant sun. The spectacle is majestic and impressing.

At 3 hours we fly over a mixed urban development consisting of three settlements along the railway line, the third of them being at the junction with another railway line.

At 3.30 the general characteristics of the landscape are still the same but the houses change. The courtyards are now bigger than before; the wings round them are narrow and the roofs look now rather horizontal. Their colour looks as if covered with clay from the fields around.

At 4 hours the landscape although basically still the same begins to change slightly. There are now patches of land uncultivated, big extended riverbanks or long swamps.

The houses have now changed even more. The scholastic rectangular courtyards do not exist anymore; the buildings turn now in even longer wings which do not surround the courtyards but are built along one or two and very seldom three sides of them. The orientation of all the buildings remains the same and it is characteristic that this orientation is the same in all the villages. The axis has a slight inclination in relation to our flight line. We are flying to West, 30 degrees to North and I am under the impression that the axis of the villages are practically West 40 to the North and North 40 to the East.

At 4.10 there is a big town to our right with probably more than 40.000 people and several villages round it quite close like satellites depending completely on it. There are some big roads crossing this city parallel and vertical to each other at quite big distances. Although they keep

Source: Pakistan Diary vol. 4, DOX-PP 40, Jan-Feb 1955. © Emma and Constantinos Doxiadis foundation.

Theoretically, Doxiadis was very critical of the top-down approach to planning that, he argued, excluded the view of the common people in the design and planning process. His theory of Ekistics presents the idea of a holistic understanding of the, 'land and the people.'[16] His theory en-

courages us to fully recognise the true demand of the people and the natural inclination of popular demand at the centre of any development discussion. However, in practice, Doxiadis' approach was no different from the typical developmentalist view that imagines a politically dormant and passive poor population. Doxiadis believed that the poor of the developing countries require external motivation for social and political mobilisation. Doxiadis' interpretation was not aimed at dismissing the potential of the Bengali population; rather, he considered the political passivity as the point of origin of development towards a full political and social emancipation. He wrote, 'It is when flying over such areas that we think more and more of the need of such people who will put in motion the forces lying idle in all these small human islands of which there are a hundred thousand in East Bengal.'[17] He suggested creating scopes for these rural people by appreciating their way of life and their architecture. He believed the experts' acknowledgement and appreciation would help to transform them into an engaging political group. How much of this philosophy was actually applied in reality is a different discussion.

However, the works of the Subaltern Studies Group during the 1980's and 90's has shown that Bengal's rural population was not at all politically disengaged even though the representation of their agency is absent in history (Guha & Chakravorty 1988). Despite these academic findings, the Western development consultants of the 1950s and 1960s generally presupposed a political impotency of the rural population for the sake of converting those people into development subjects. most of the development theories were based on "community development" that promised to integrate the local population into the decision-making process. However, in reality, 'development' has been largely a top-down approach that strengthens the authority of the local elites (Immerwahr 2008). Doxiadis of course was no exception.

Doxiadis suggested that the ephemeral nature of the riverine landscape, having such a profound effect on the people of East Pakistan, inhibited a move towards urbanism. On his way back from the port city of Chittagong via the river of Karnaphuli, Doxiadis reflected on his experience with the people of East Pakistan, 'Are these people urban dwellers? Have the people whom I met yesterday in Narayangansz [*sic*; Narayanganj] been urban dwellers? They certainly do not look so; but if they are not urban dwellers why should we build urban centers for them?'[18] Chittagong, he explained is an 'old town without any urban tradi-

tion at all.'[19] The East Pakistani people's lives and their perception of the built environment, as it appears to Doxiadis, were exclusively dominated by the natural setting which he viewed as essentially contrary to urban culture. Doxiadis also assumed that there existed a core Bengali culture that is apolitical, natural and unaffected by the numerous external political and military invasions. This perception can be challenged from a historiographic point of view, but Doxiadis was eager to discover the core Bengali culture intertwined with its landscape. His designs were based on this understanding of Bengali culture.

What kind of architecture, then, did Doxiadis believe the naturally rural people of East Pakistan deserved? Doxiadis suggested that, in order to create an appropriate architecture for East Pakistan, the country must imagine a radical break from the region's monumental architectural past, starting from the pre-fifteenth century Sultanate and continuing through the modern times. Doxiadis suggested that until now no other foreign rulers or empires—Sultanate, Mughal or British—understood the true nature of dwelling in Bengal. Rulers had only imposed their understanding of monumental architecture on the common people of Bengal.[20] Although Doxiadis' perception of the history of Bengal was informed by orientalist views (Daechsel 2011), his recommendation for contextual architecture was quite different for its time.

Doxiadis believed that urbanism for Bengal must be very different from the conventional land-based understanding of urbanisation. Doxiadis struggled to understand the wet landscape of Bengal, which was a complex amalgamation of waterbodies as beel (বিল), jhil (ঝিল), haor (হাওড়), baor (বাওড়), tank, dighi (দীঘি), rivers, canals, seas and many other variations of waterbodies. Architect and planner Dilip da Cunha argued that the colonial imagination of Bengal's landscape is reductively based on an erroneous colonial fabrication of the idea that a river is a sharp and linear geometric entity that has a fixed origin and a fixed destination point. This colonial construction focused more on land than on the wetness of the environment and, as a result, the urban and natural landscape of Bengal for a very long time has been misunderstood and misinterpreted (Cunha 2018). The Pakistani state's approach to Bengal was not any different. Doxiadis was not aware of the colonial history of the landscape, but he was right to challenge the misconception of Bengal as being a primarily land-based formation. However, he did not elaborate

or did not have the right opportunity to explore potentially more appropriate forms of urbanisation and architecture for Bengal.

Conclusion

By discussing the political context of architectural projects of DA in East Pakistan, this paper shows how architecture can offer a new approach to the history of rural development. Doxiadis' interpretation of Bengal's rural frontier challenges the casting of its citizens as powerless, uneducated and uncultured rural elements by Ayub Khan's regime. Whereas West Pakistan's leaders relegated Bengali people to the margins by defining the rural and the backward as two sides of one coin, Doxiadis used the same language and intellectual framework of ruralism to empower the Bengali rural population. Rural Bengal, in Doxiadis' interpretation, was removed from state domination. Anonymous rural people who continue to exist naturally like 'plants and animals' could be transformed into agents of development and thus would be able to change the course of history. The visual programme of his architecture thus proposed a counter narration of Ayub Khan's proposition of the political unconscious of the "illiterate people" (Khan 1965). Informed by contemporary theories of development and his own philosophy of Ekistics, Doxiadis' projects in East Pakistan offer an ambivalent concept of the rural. This conceptualisation of the rural was based on the political construction of a specific kind of citizenry that would challenge the authority of the state but would work in favour of development.

The architectural design and the visual programme of Comilla Academy problematised the state discourse of East Pakistan's rural backwardness and differences. Doxiadis suggested that instead of superimposing a policy or architecture from above, the state's responsibility would be limited to acquiring an in-depth and holistic understanding of its "folk" lifestyle and preferences and would thus make way for incorporating the popular view in future planning. The state's role, Doxiadis explained, is mainly to "know" its "folk" and manage projects to empower the will of its subjects. The design of Comilla Academy is a critical call to understand the wet landscape of East Pakistan from a new post-colonial perspective.

What West Pakistan dismissed as rural, Doxiadis reinterpreted as a new scope. The dispersed planning principle, the long corridors with no walls, the use of existing water tanks, and the use of a low embankment all

refer to Doxiadis' critique of West Pakistan and a land-based understanding of monumental architecture. This argument is more tangibly expressed in the use of the monumental dochala as a symbol of an empowered rural population. Doxiadis also challenged the (West Pakistani) state's anxiety about East Bengal's illiterate rural population as symptommatic of regionalism. Doxiadis suggested, with much chagrin from his West Pakistan commissioner, that a strong regional autonomy within Pakistan ought to be achieved.

Perhaps this is the reason why Doxiadis, albeit working for the central government, had no hesitation to approve and subscribe to the design of the Bengali cultural icon, the dochala. His deployment of this cultural image was intended to create a sense of territoriality on the endless sprawl of the East Pakistani rural frontier, which was misunderstood by West Pakistan. Doxiadis eventually reinterpreted the statist representations of East Pakistan's rural landscape and cultivated the idea that abstract space of rural and agricultural land would become socialised via political, economic and cognitive appropriation and would thus carve out a Bengali regional identity in terms of fixed geographic territoriality that would not contradict Pakistani nationalism.[21]

The Pakistani state's narrative of "rural backwardness" as a pretext to impose "rural development" was a way of imposing an imaginary "national culture" over the country's diversified population. Doxiadis, a government-employed foreign expert, reinterpreted the state's narration of East Pakistan's rural backwardness with the objective of challenging the state's reductive notion of its Bengali citizens. Instead of considering rural backwardness as the opposite of progress-oriented urban culture, Doxiadis questioned the Pakistani state's very notion of planning and architecture, which was rigidly tied to the colonial perception of land and monument. In the end, Doxiadis imagined a new architectural language that, on the one hand, would politically empower the rural population by visualising and monumentalising a "folk" form and, on the other hand, would propose to form a new architectural language of flexibility, repetition, and organic growth that explores the unique wet landscape of East Pakistan.

Endnotes

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the South Asia seminar at Humboldt University of Berlin in February 2019. Comments from Michael Mann and Anandita Bajpai helped me to prepare the first draft. A special thanks goes to Sadia Bajwa for her feedback and editorial help. I am grateful to Giota Pavlidou for her help and guidance at the archives of Constantinos Doxiadis in Athens. The archival research for this essay was funded by the General Research Fund of the University of Kansas.

[2] I use East Pakistan and East Bengal interchangeably. Before 1955 *One Unit Act*, East Pakistan was considered as the province of East Bengal.

[3] One Month's Orientation Programme for social welfare organization (August 5-September 4, 1963), *A handbook of basic democracies, Part I,* Government of East Pakistan, Health, Social Welfare and Local Government Department. Doxiadis Papers, Emma and Constantinos Doxiadis Foundation, Constantinos A. Doxiadis Archives, Athens (hereafter CADA), .Benaki Miuseum, 1969.

[4] Pakistan Volume 3, Report Dox 21, Pakistan Ekistick, CADA.

[5] Chajja means overhanging eaves to protect wall opening. Chajja is an important element in the architecture of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Punjab. Mughal builders appropriated the element in their architecture. Architecture of Fathepur Sikri is a good example of such appropriation.

[6] Previously I have briefly mentioned that the use of dochala form has been appropriated by the Mughals and sometimes was seen as a symbol of appropriation of local form by the centralised government (Karim 2017).

[7] Pakistan Diaries and Reports, Dox, pp. 85-93, August 1955- Nov 1956.

[8] Pakistan Volume 3, Report Dox 21, Pakistan Ekistick, 1955.

[9] Pakistan Volume 4, Dox 4, p. 21, CADA, 1955.

[10] Dispositif is a term used by the French Michel Foucault, generally to refer to the various institutional, physical, and administrative mechanisms and knowledge structures which enhance and maintain the exercise of power within the social body.

[11] The green on Bangladesh flag was different from *Islamic Green* (visual marker of Pan-Muslim society) and *Pakistan Green. Islamic Green* is the official name of the shade of green used in the flag of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. *Pakistan Green* is the official name of the shade used in the flag of Pakistan.

[12] Pakistan Volume 2, 100, CADA.

[13] Ibid., 100.

[14] Ibid., 101.

[15] Doxiadis' Diary, 12 October-23 November 1954, CADA.

[16] 'Ekistics' is an overarching theory of an integrated design discipline that takes the development and evolution of physical environment holistically–regional, urban and rural planning as well as community settlements, housing and individual dwellings. Through Ekistics, Doxiadis wanted to achieve a scientific mode of design that would combine aesthetics with ecology, anthropology, politics and culture (Doxiadis 1968).

[17] Pakistan Volume 4, Dox 40, Athens March 1955; Doxiadis' Diary, 20 January-24 February, 167f, CADA.

[18] Pakistan Volume 2, Diary, 301, CADA.

[19] Pakistan Volume 2, Diary, 86, CADA.

[20] Pakistan Volume 3, Report Dox 21, Pakistan Ekistick, CADA.

[21] By territoriality, I do not only mean human instinct related to the sense of ownership of land but an also a powerful and often indispensable geographical strategy used to control people and things by controlling area (Saek 1983; Slatman 2002; Sack 1983); strategy for establishing differential access to things and people (Dawson, Zanotti, Vacearo).

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